Learning log #2

**Universal Design for Learning:**

I believe that universal design is a really useful practice within the classroom. Utilizing universal design within the classroom allows all students, disabled and non-disabled, to gain access to the general education through a variety of avenues. Allowing students to access information using their preferences also allows them to acquire information in such as way that is more conducive to their learning. Another important aspect to this design is that it is easy to understand no matter what the learner’s experience, background knowledge, language skills, or level of focus/attention. This aspect is especially important for students with multiple disabilities. UDL also communicates important information to the student, regardless of their disabilities or the environment conditions.

One piece of information on UDL that I found to be incredibly useful was the following instructional methods: class climate; physical access/usability/safety; delivery methods; information resources; interaction; feedback; assessment; and accommodation. Classroom climate is one facet that I believe to be incredibly important to a successful educational experience. If each student feels respected and included, then there will be a greater chance for success and achievement. When you practice high values and model that for your students, especially with respect to diversity and differences, your students will become more open-minded and tolerant in the differences of others. Another important factor to consider is to make certain that all activities, materials, and equipment are physically accessible to all students regardless of their disability.

Delivery of instruction is another very important aspect to UDL. Students should receive a variety of instructional methods. Some of those methods include: direct instruction, cooperative groupings, hands-on activities, internet or computer activities/projects, software, field work, and variety of content in order to keep student interest high. This is especially beneficial in my classroom because my students easily become bored, which results in an increase on problematic behaviors. If I keep activities constantly changing, while at the same time utilizing a variety of methods, I can keep it interesting while at the same time making sure that I capitalize on each student’s strengths and needs. Each student is unique and it would be next to impossible to “cater” to each child’s strengths and needs by continuously utilizing the same methods over and over.

Another factor in UDL that I frequently utilize within the classroom is interaction. I believe that any appropriate interaction between students and staff or student and peers is quite useful to the learning experience. It is important, therefore, to make sure that each student is able to access interaction with adults and peers. In my classroom, I have 2 students who are unable to read at all, 3 students who greatly struggle with reading, and 3 others who are fairly strong in reading, but may lack the reading comprehension skills. This does not mean that we always have to do group work……in fact, I like to change it up and pair students with someone who may have strengths that the other may be lacking in. More often than not, this really helps the students to feel better about themselves, while a t the same time interacting in an appropriate manner.

Feedback is another important feature to UDL. Giving your students feedback can help in a variety of ways. For example, with positive feedback, it allows them to feel good about him or herself, receive information that lets them know what they are doing right, allows them to see if they are on track, and/or gives them a sense of accomplishment. Negative feedback is also important, but should be used in such a way that is not detrimental to the student’s self-esteem, confidence, etc. If negative feedback needs to be given, it should be done in such a way as to tell the student what the replacement behavior is. For example, when a student calls out, your response could be something like this: “Jon, can you please not call out in class. We want to hear what you want to say, but I would like you to raise your hand so that you can get your turn.”

Assessing students regularly is also important to make sure that they are making progress. Assessing only through tests or essays, isn’t the best way to get a feel for what the student really knows and understands. I think that it is important to remember that each child learns differently and each child in turn expresses their knowledge in different ways as well.

**Multiple Intelligences:**

I learned about Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences several semesters ago and found it to be really interesting (I have actually gone around and given some of my friends and family the assessment). I do feel as though this concept of multiple intelligences does play an integral part in our students learning. Along with UDL, it is important to keep in mind that each student learns differently and expresses him or herself differently as well.

Technology has increasingly become more and more important to both us as teachers, as well as to our students. With the ever-changing economy, job market, etc. It is important to remain diligent in keeping up with the ever-changing technological advances and improvements because our students will only benefit.

While each student has different “intelligences”, I still think that it is important to tap into not only the stronger or most prominent intelligences, but also to those intelligences that a student does not favor or flourish. For example, a student whose weaker intelligence is verbal-linguistic, technology can assist by offering new communication and learning opportunities to students with multiple disabilities, strengths and needs. For the visually impaired, a screen-reader or “Voice Type”, may be helpful. On the other hand, a student with a hearing impairment may benefit from a “Speech Viewer” and "Phone Communicator”.

Interpersonal intelligence is another intelligence that I found interesting in terms of technology. In many classrooms, most students utilize the computer independently. The questions is, then how can technology enhance interpersonal skills among students that may need to develop this intelligence? The answer is pretty simple….. create more projects or activities that include cooperative learning groups or pairs on the computer. Other ideas include videotaping group projects and presentations in order to critique performance and networking with other students across the country or world.

In general, I think it is very important for educators to learn and improve upon their teaching using the UDL method. I feel that although I have a learned a lot just by researching a few websites and articles, I know that there is so much more out there to learn and to take into consideration. It seems pretty overwhelming – all the information that is out there – but I know that as I acquire some new techniques here and there, I will eventually get used to those and try to find some new ones along the way. I do think, that although this is super overwhelming, I will make sure that I pass on the methods that I do like to others in the hopes that they will improve upon their own portfolio and pass on methods/techniques/strategies/technology activities/etc.